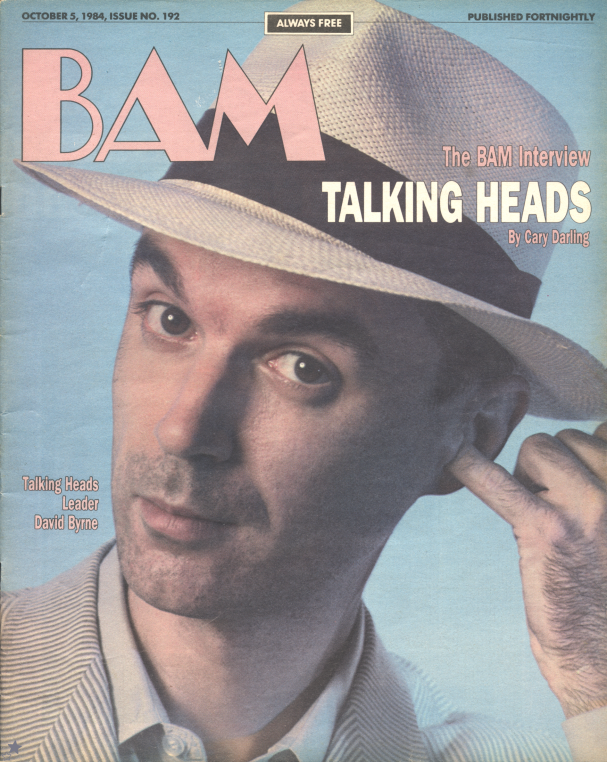


BAM



The BAM Interview

TALKING HEADS

By Cary Darling

Talking Heads
Leader
David Byrne

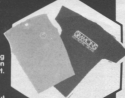
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As Cary Darling drove through LA-death-beat en route to interview the gentleman at right, he could be forgiven for wondering what to expect from the Talking Heads leader. After all, Mr. Byrne's two most popular songs, "Psycho Killer" and "Burning Down the House," were lyrically open-ended (if not menacing), his early vocal performances were punctuated by seemingly uncontrollable yelps and warbles, and the normal-guy-with-a-problem persona he evokes in his songs has been enhanced by speculation among interviewers that he is, well, a bit odd.

What Cary found was a soft-spoken, articulate person with a tendency to end his answers as if he hadn't finished speaking. This made for some uncomfortable silences at the beginning, but the resulting interview provides some real insights into a man whose ever-evolving music has given the pop music world something of a challenge. From the sparse rhythms of *Talking Heads 77* through the densely textured *Remain in Light* and the stripped-down funk of *Speaking in Tongues* (all captured in the current performance film, *Stop Making Sense*) Byrne and company have attained popularity through the unlikely process of not underestimating their audience. Perhaps others will follow suit.

—BF

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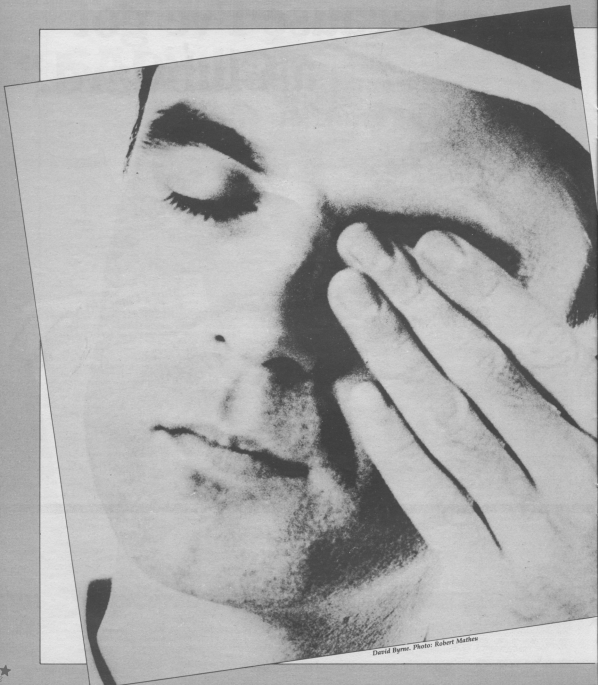
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TALKING HEADS MAKE SENSE BY CARY DARLING



David Byrne. Photo: Robert Maches



WHY IS DAVE BYRNE SO COOL?

Dave Byrne is sweating. It's one of those tortuous, lifeless late summer LA days when it seems the whole world has been wrapped in one thick, steamy blanket. You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind is blowing because there is no wind; just heat, perspiration, and fumes from the cars roaring up and down the nearby boulevard.

Byrne is seated at an outdoor table of a restaurant tucked away in the bowels of Laurel Canyon. But this perpetual New Yorker has made no concessions to the sunbaked landscape of Southern California; he is fully dressed with a long sleeve shirt and a sport jacket, the latter draped over his arm. Way to go, David.

Somehow, though, his clothing is oddly appropriate in that Byrne and his band, Talking Heads, represent a sound that is quintessentially New York: urban paranoia meshed with multi-cultural rhythms and strained through a filter of art school smarts. The group has gone from being every underground critic's little plaything to an international success story. Granted, they aren't raining on Prince's passing parade, but for a band which was never considered hitmakers, they are doing just fine, thank you.

The 1983 album, *Speaking in Tongues*, went gold and spawned a Top 10 hit with "Burning Down the House." Their last tour was put on celluloid for a feature length concert film, *Stop Making Sense*, which brought down the houses at the San Francisco International and Los Angeles Filmex film festivals. The movie opens in theatres around the country this month. Meanwhile, Byrne is co-starring opposite Hope Lange, Rosanna Arquette, and John Stockwell in PBS-TV's *Savannah* Guides.

To buck up a bit, the Heads began at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence in 1974 where Byrne (born in 1952 in Dunbarton, Scotland, but raised in Baltimore) and drummer Chris Frantz played in a dance band called The Artistics. Being the intellectual pranksters they were, that name quickly mutated into The Autistics. Tiring of art

school, Byrne, Frantz, and friend/future bassist Martina Weymouth, another RISD veteran, set out for New York with the slim but guarded hope of making a living out of music.

Somebody's guardian angel must have been looking over them, for they arrived in New York just in time to be declared part of a scene, a movement — the same one which spawned such pre-punk and quasi-punk heroes as The Ramones, Blondie, Television, Patti Smith, David Johansson, Johnny Thunders, and Jonathan Richman & The Modern Lovers. It was the latter band which provided Byrne and company with their fourth member, guitarist/keyboards player/singer Jerry Harrison.

Their music was a stark and jangling mix of art house minimalism and Manhattan grit overlaid with Byrne's dry, obsessive vocals and terse lyrics which — even when they were optimistic — possessed an undercurrent of impending emotional collapse. They soon became one of the most talked-about bands on the Big Apple club circuit and Sire Records asked them to sign on the dotted line in 1977. The first album, *Talking Heads: 77*, was not a big seller, yet it laid the foundation for their future work as well as for much of what came to be called "new wave."

The second album, *More Songs about Buildings and Food*, marked the beginning of their working relationship with producer/musical theoretician Brian Eno, and produced their first hit, a lean version of Al Green's "Take Me to the River." The third album, *Fear of Music*, had them straddling the cultural fence. They were simultaneously looking ahead into a future of richly textured, intelligent art-funk with a heady African influence and into a past of stripped-down, angular pop. With *Remain in Light*, and the subsequent live album, the transformation was complete. Byrne, the new shaman for the MTV generation, led his eclectic tribe into an orgy of sound and rhythm which would send critics to their typewriters, clubbers to the dancefloors, and an increasing number of consumers into the stores.

The video for "Cryseidee and Painless," directed by Toni Basil, featured pop and lock dancing three years before the rest of the would-be

hip began dropping street dancing into every video and commercial. Other Heads videos, especially "Once in a Lifetime," proved that there were a handful of people who could manipulate the over-used medium to their own advantage. In it, Byrne keeps viewers riveted not with glass breaking in slow motion or well-endowed women in chains but with his very presence. He is a man stricken with apoplexy, stranded on an emotional cliff, ready to be pushed over the edge.

Back in the real world, Talking Heads expanded onstage into a nine-piece band (including famed string bender Adrian Belew and keyboards player Bernie Worrell from the P-Funk family). Chris and Tina (now husband and wife) started their own side project called the Tom Tom Club which managed to get its share of European, black, and club hits with "Wordy Rapping-hood," "Genius of Love," and "The Man with the 4-Way Hips." Jerry Harrison released an ill-fated solo album, *The Red and the Black*.

Byrne found time to write a score for dancer Twyla Tharp (*The Catherine Wheel*) and collaborate with Eno on *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, an album whereby music was scored to "found words," or pre-existing radio broadcasts and tribal chants.

Still, their most successful project has been *Speaking in Tongues*, the album which showed the band shedding some of their love of Africanisms and exposing a tender pop underside. The success of *Tongues* is perhaps one reason why Byrne is financially able to work on his next project. He's conceiving and directing a feature narrative film to be released in 1985. Through it all, Talking Heads have remained one of the few bands to maintain respect from white, black, pop, avant-garde, old wave, new wave, American and European audiences.

But back to Byrne. He talks just above a whisper — with a very slight suggestion of a Southern accent — and it sometimes seems as if he's going to trail off into nothingness and never start speaking again.

He's temporarily in Los Angeles to work on his feature film, but it seems he hasn't let the new world of filmmaking or the sauna-like weather ruffle his quiet demeanor. No matter how much Byrne might

sweat, there's only one word that can describe him: Cool.

Did you like the filmmaking process (for Stop Making Sense), as opposed to the music-making process, and do you plan to get involved in any other films?

Yeah, but not a concert film right away. I like the process; you can start with all this stuff that's all scattered and then you can put it together and see something emerge from it. It's a lot of fun to look at something a few different ways and see how it seems to have a different emphasis or a different effect. For instance, in the beginning of the film, I had an idea that the film would begin, as it does, with a real wide shot — well, actually a tight shot of my shoes — and then, after that, I'd thought we'd go real wide and have the whole stage. It would be like that for quite a few numbers before you got quite close to any of the performers. You'd really be far, far away and then gradually, as you saw what was happening and got acquainted, you'd move in closer.

As it turned out, we looked at something like that and it turned out to be rather frustrating when you looked at it. When you compare the wider shots with the closer ones, which had more emotional intensity, it was kind of ridiculous to keep with the wide ones all the time.

I understand the band is scoring a narrative film, who's directing?

I'm going to do it myself. I've done videos so I thought, "Well, I think I want to try a longer one."

Are you intimidated by the film process or the industry?

The industry intimidates me. The process of making it and that kind of thing doesn't. The industry does because I want to make something that's unconventional but that's not inaccessible. The characters or the style might be unusual but I don't want it to be an inaccessible art form thing.

What is the story?

I worked on it; it's about a mid-sized town and it's set in Texas. (Smiles) Gee, I better leave it at that. My working process was a little bit unique. I started with a storyboard and drawings rather than with a story with characters. I started with

ideas of how music could fit in and did drawings of what the images should look like and gradually just collected a lot of those. I've been collecting, over the last year or so, articles about interesting characters from the *Enquirer*, *Weekly World News* and those tabloid kinds of papers. There was one about a woman who decided to spend her life in bed. She's quite happy doing that. She's spent like 30 years in bed. And she seemed like an interesting character. So it's a collection of people like that and then there's a story that connects them all together. Anyway I started with these drawings until I ended up with a wall full of them — just pinned up, about 120 of them all over the wall. I re-arranged those until they had some kind of flow to them. Then I talked to writers about — the characters were in there but there was no story connecting them. So I talked to writers about a story or a number of stories connecting them.

With your move into film, and your use of video in the past, do you believe that video will replace live performance?

They can complement one another. They're completely different. There's nothing like a live performance for that feeling of immediacy, if the performance is good. But I think there are plenty of musicians and bands who might be great on record but they're just not good live performers. They might be the ones who should stick to making records or videos. There really are good people who are really good at videos and it's entirely possible that some of them might not even be good singers or good musicians. I could imagine there are acts which are video acts. Maybe they will have other people who will play their music because they're video performers. I don't see anything wrong with that.

You obviously see video as more than just a promotional tool.

Yes I do. That might be a mistake but I think that it's a little bit of both. I think they'll continue to exist as a promotional tool and in some cases they can be more. But I don't think they should be pegged either way.

One psychologist was quoted as saying the "Burning Down the House" video promotes arson.

She must have had it confused with another. I think the kids that watch them and get into them, they don't take them that seriously. I mean, the heavy metal videos — there's one by Ronnie James Dio, with the elevator that goes to hell and stuff. I said "Godd!" It's like kids who used to go to drive-ins to see people's heads got cut off. It's all for a laugh I think. It's not that serious. I just saw the one Alan Arkush

did for Christine McVie. I thought it was hilarious.

Do you use much of what you learned in art school in your videos or on Talking Heads records?

Not so much art school but I still have a lot of dealings with artists, performance artists and theoretical artists. I do get a lot of ideas, swipe a lot of ideas from those people. It's not really stealing; it's more sort of inspiration. For "Burning Down the House," I brought a woman from New York, a performance artist named Julia Hayward. She's still around, she does more or less the same thing that Laurie Anderson does, a lot of visual stuff, slides, little devices, mirrors, and little things. She just hasn't quite made it. But she has some really good ideas.

When you left art school to go into music, did you feel you were taking a big risk or was it all just for fun?

It was one of those things where it was, of course, a risk, but it was such a big risk. It seemed like such a long shot that we would actually make a living, that you didn't want to place too much importance on it. I didn't want to tell myself that it doesn't succeed. I don't know what I'm going to do with my life. I had to keep telling myself that if this succeeds, I'm going to do it and I'll be very happy. I'm not going to tell myself that this is the only thing I can do with my life, otherwise I'd just be heartbroken if we weren't well-received. As it turned out, we were real lucky that we rehearsed and made our debut when we did in New York. That was a time when clubs were letting bands come in and play their own material. Clubs like CBGB's and couple of others would just let anybody audition and, if you were halfway decent, you could play for an audience on the weekends, which was neat.

Did you leave art school for music because you felt, to most people, art is something that is removed from them in a museum whereas pop music is more immediate?

It's kind of a cliché but I thought that if (art) was elitist. I thought it might be possible to do something that has the quality of fine art but doesn't seem quite as pretentious. It could be something that anybody could like. I liked, and still like, the idea that it has to go out into the marketplace and compete with everything else. That's kind of a tough proposition and a lot of times you tell yourself, "Gee, I wish I were treated like an artist." You wouldn't have to compete with Michael Jackson and whoever's made millions of dollars and there's no way you can compete with that being just a little band starting out. But it's a neat kind of challenge.

Some people contend that the marketplace debases the artist because you have to reach the lowest common denominator to sell a million records.

I kind of have this naive optimism that if you do something that's well-crafted and innovative, that people will come around to it eventually. The ordinary public can like things that are really good. You don't have to play down to them or pander to people. I might be wrong about that, and a lot of things do seem to pander to the lowest common denominator, but I don't think it has to be that way.

When you first started, the press lumped Talking Heads with all the other punk and new wave bands. But you seemed philosophically different. While other bands were talking about destroying the government, a song on your first album was "Don't Worry about the Government."

I guess we were being a little perverse. (Laughs) Even then a lot of bands were very different. We seemed more similar at the time because we were all new and a little bit crude. We didn't have money to be everything that we thought we could be. It always seemed to me, even in that crude state, you could see that. The various bands, at least in New York, were headed in different directions. Where a band like Blondie saw pop songs as being an art form and they liked well-done commercial pop music.

Your first album came out in 1977, one of the peak years for disco.

We were listening to disco. A lot of the punk and new wave bands said that all disco and R&B and everything else were garbage. We were listening to the funkier disco, stuff like Funkadelic, Al Green, KC & the Sunshine Band, George McRae and stuff like that. It seemed to have a little more soul to it than some of the slicker stuff that was giving disco a bad name.

In terms of the first albums, was the minimalist approach used because that's what you wanted or because you couldn't play any better?

We wanted it to be that way. I think that's pretty much what we were about, stripping things down to their barest essentials, learning what you really need to make a song, and then you can kind of add things after that. I think that's kind of a normal progression for somebody who wants to try

something new: throw out everything else, just throw out as much as you can, strip it down to whatever's left. Then you can say, "This is mine. I can understand this."

How did you meet Brian Eno?

John Cale brought him to see us, the first time we played in London. We played in a little club.

Was that when you toured with Dire Straits?

No, that was a year later. This was 1976 or 1977 and I think we had one single out then. We got along real well (with Eno) and we just kept in touch. We corresponded by mail. He'd come to New York to visit and we became pretty close and eventually we ended up working together.

What were some of the techniques you learned from Eno?

We all listened to a lot of dub records, Jamaican dub records. So we ended up using a lot of echo, echoplexes, stuff like that, to make simple rhythms sound like more complex rhythms. Although on our records you don't hear it; it doesn't sound like a dub mix, but the same technique is used here and there.

Whose idea was it to cover Al Green's "Take Me to the River," and wasn't Al going to reciprocate by covering a Talking Heads song?

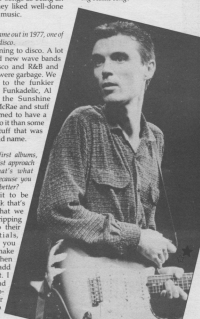


Photo: Clayton Call

No, I don't think so. Before we were Talking Heads, Chris and I were in a dance band and we did "Love and Happiness." It was mainly Chris' idea that we do one of his songs and I thought we shouldn't do the same one again.

Was that when you first got interested in African music?

Well, I had a collection of records I'd bought and after hearing more of these, I was trying to figure out what this music was about, what its basis was. While we were working on the *Bush of Ghosts* record, we had the notion that this kind of music had a very different basis though it often would sound very familiar. It had a different framework. It had different social implications. It comes from a whole different place than European pop music. A lot of American music is a mixture of the two forms. We were really fascinated by just listening and trying to understand the source of this music that was very different from our European heritage. It offered some kind of hope; just the sound, the way it was organized kind of said that.

What about the criticism that you were just ripping off African culture?

I don't know what to say. We were, but it was more of a source of inspiration rather than saying, "Take a riff off that record" or "Let's do a record that sounds like a Fela (Kuti) record." So we ended up with a sound that doesn't really sound like that at all. The records don't sound like Hi-Life or anything else.

It was around that time that you got the idea of enlarging the band?

After we'd worked that for awhile in the studio, we thought we'd have to do something new live. If we're trying to say something new musically, we can't just go out with the same old band and play it like they're just some new songs. We were trying to do a different kind of music. We couldn't do it the same way. One of the solutions was to double the size of the band.

That must not have been easy at first, in terms of playing or the ego involved.

Yeah, it was kind of traumatic. The performances were so exciting for everybody, you'd get this jumble, a mass of sound coming from everywhere. Everybody was playing at once. You felt like you were this whole community doing this thing. The first few performances, everybody just realized that this was a whole thing that was happening even when it sounded kind of sloppy. That kind of smoothed over the ego problems at the time. They've resurfaced from time to time but at least we didn't have to deal with it all at once.

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JERRY HARRISON ON KEY

LOS ANGELES — Mention David Byrne or for that matter, Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth (a.k.a. The Tom Tom Club) to the average rock fan in the street and the likely response will be a nod of recognition. But ask those very same people who Jerry Harrison is and you've got a reaction worthy of Art Fleming and the *Jaggyr* crew. Though Harrison plays guitars and keyboards for Talking Heads, and is an integral part in forming their sound, he is definitely the most faceless Head.

Harrison is well aware of his anonymous status, in terms of the public eye, and he admits that it does rankle him just a bit. "I guess so, I think that as far as the recognition factor goes, Tina and David are the two who are most recognized," he says. "There was a time, because I'd been involved with the Modern Lovers and because I was the newest member of Talking Heads, when more attention was given to me. Then things settled down. Also, there's the fact there are so many other members when we're onstage and that means more of the focus ends up going to David because you can't take it in all at once. Whereas when you're a foursome, you could take it all in."

Harrison's bid for his own success was the 1981 solo album, *The Red and the Black*, a spirited mix of avant-garde and rock elements which fell on deaf ears. "It was disappointing," he remarks on the album's lackluster sales. "The normal way you try to draw attention to an album is you go on tour, and that sort of was impossible, because we immediately went back into Talking Heads projects. So that's a difficulty you have to deal with. Both that and (David Byrne's) *The Catherine Wheel*, for one reason or another, didn't sell. Whether it's the radio or the record, I don't know, you know these excuses people always make. But neither of them got the attention that Talking Heads albums were beginning to get. We thought that success would continue with these solo projects and it didn't, except for the Tom Tom Club. They had a great single but I wonder if it would've gotten the attention it deserved had that not happened and had it not had previous success in England."

In retrospect, he feels that it may have been too complex for many people. "It switches styles a

lot and I really like listening to it in small segments, not putting on the whole album and listening all the way through," he notes. "Being it was my first record, there was a tendency to want to do a lot of different things. When I watched people listen to both sides at once, they became exhausted by it. After six or seven songs, they couldn't take it."

"The back cover gave it away," he laughs mischievously, referring to how the credits were obscured behind a design. "It's all this information behind this thing; that's just what the music is like. It did some things I'd never heard done before. It had approaches to rhythmic counterpoint that I'd never heard, like on jazz or any kind of albums."

His new album, which he is working on with guitarist Alex Weir, who also plays with Talking Heads in their expanded live lineup, will be different. "It's a little simpler in the way the songs are constructed; that's the important thing," he emphasizes. "As much as I love that album (*The Red and the Black*), it was a little inaccessible for some people, so I tried to make this one accessible. I worked very closely with Alex, so the initial construction of the songs reflects a lot of his thinking, as well."

In Talking Heads' early days, Harrison was primarily a guitarist, but he has found this role de-emphasized over the last few years. "I started playing guitar around the end of the Modern Lovers because I was frustrated with Jonathan changing his guitar styles. That's what started me playing guitar, and I just continued practicing. But it went with a philosophy I had of not being a specialist, but being able to pick the right sounds for each song and make something that fits closely with the existing music. I didn't want to be a soloist," he remembers.

"I'm certainly more conversant with keyboards and, since we've expanded the band, I play guitar less, because we had Adrian (Belew) and now Alex. That cut down on my guitar playing; I miss it. You have more of a complete contact with music playing guitar, because you bend strings and so forth. Some-

how, there's a little bit of a difference in keyboards. It's a little more cerebral. But in going the other direction, there's the advent of these new types of keyboards with these great possibilities and I've spent a lot of time trying to figure them out. They provide such exciting possibilities."

Harrison has been intimately involved, along with Byrne, in the development of their upcoming narrative feature film. He recently went to Houston to talk to someone about doing the entire movie in a digital 24-track process. "The thing about film is you have to involve so many people," he reflects. "Somehow it seems like a harder process to control. It's like with the bigger band, you have all these talented people contributing but you find a lot of what you're doing has more to do with simple coordination." □



Jerry Harrison. Photo: Ann Somers

DAVID BYRNE

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I had read that if the band hadn't enlarged, it might have broken up because you felt that Talking Heads had gone as far as it could go in its old form.

Well, I don't know if we would have disbanded, but I don't know what kind of performances we would have done. I really felt strongly that we really had to have a different kind of performance. The tour before that had been a seven or eight month tour and it was one of those things where you say, "I sure don't want to go through that again!"

At one point, you and Eno were out here working with Toni Basil.

One of the things that brought Brian Eno and me out here to L.A. to work was that we had seen some tapes that Toni Basil had of the Electric Boogaloos rehearsing. The Lockers had disbanded and I knew her from The Lockers. But these guys were doing this whole new thing, fluid robot stuff. Both Brian and I thought it was the most exciting dancing we had ever seen. Originally we came out here because she had been offered to do a TV show with these guys dancing. This was 1979 or 1980. We thought we'd do a little bit of the music for it but it all fell through.

So she did the "Crescendos and Pinpoints" video with the same people?

Yeah, some of the same people.

Was it your idea or Eno's for My Life in the Bush of Ghosts?

It was both of us wanting to do something together based on a lot of African and Third World music we'd been listening to. We wanted to somehow establish a completely different musical style for ourselves. The idea of using all the found words was his and we tried it on one thing and it worked real easy. So after that, I said "Let's do this for the whole record. Let's make this the theme that holds this music together." That's the way the whole thing worked.

With all your outside projects, as well as Chris and Tina's outside work and Jerry Harrison's solo album, does this sap energy from Talking Heads?

It gave everybody in the band a lot of confidence that they really did have something of their own to contribute. They really did have something of their own to say. That ended up working really well. It sort of eased the band members' fears that they were dependent on me. They realized they weren't. So they could tell me where to get off if they wanted to.

Has the big band concept reached its end?

Yeah, I guess so.

Do you know what will replace it? Not yet.

So you won't be touring for awhile?

No, it doesn't look like it. If this film thing works out, then it will replace touring for this project. I assume that by next year, we might have some more ideas about how we can perform live in some way that's new and interesting.

The last album, *Speaking in Tongues*, seems a lot more spare than *Remain in Light*.

I guess we thought we would try and consolidate everything we've learned and use some of the rhythms and techniques that we'd gotten into more recently but then go for more of the stripped-down sound we started with.

This was the first album in a while that wasn't produced by Eno. Did you have a philosophical difference with him?

We were old enough and knew enough to try it and it worked out all right. Now we can either choose it (a producer) again or not. I'm not against the idea of producers. It's great having that extra ear there. A lot of times you lose perspective on what you've done; you don't know if it's great or not. You have to rely on other band members or somebody else to tell you.

Since the beginning, Talking Heads have been cast as an intellectual band. Do you feel people take you too seriously?

I don't want to say we're stupid, but we have fun. When we dance and jump around, we have a lot of fun.

It seems the band is having more fun on stage than in 1977.

Yeah, it's certainly easy to see how from the early performances how we got labelled as psychotic or intellectual.

Were you having fun then?

I guess I was or I wouldn't have kept doing it. I think it was a different kind of fun.

A lot of people feel, judging from your performances, you were on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Was your stage persona a mirror of your personal life at the time or was it merely stage demeanor?

I don't know. My personal life wasn't that messed up. I was pretty much concerned with writing and the band surviving. I didn't have time to get into any weird relationships.

Your image strikes some people as neurotic. At any point, did you feel people were missing the point of what you were doing and that you would have to lose it down?

I thought it was getting misread a little bit. For instance, our record

Fear of Music, I thought it had a lot of dry humor in it. I guess a lot of people didn't pick up on that. They ended up saying it was just very disturbed. I had to say, "Well, if they didn't pick it up on it then I guess I didn't write it right." So I have to re-evaluate what I'm doing because I want that element to be seen.

So you blame yourself more than the audience?

A little bit of both. I have to learn how to do it (write) so that it still does what I want but that element (of humor) still comes across.

Are you still using the cut-up technique of writing (whereby random words are put together and form their own patterns)?

I have done that but I try to change the way I do it all the time. The stuff I'm working on now I'm trying to write all the words first, which I haven't done for a long time — with rhythms and whatnot.

More of a structured pop style?

I guess so. I think they're always structured more or less like a song but since this has to fit in with the visual element (for the upcoming narrative film), a kind of predetermined what the attitude is. In most cases, it's probably true for me too, it's important that the words just don't say anything wrong by sounding stupid or having the wrong attitude. As long as the lyrics aren't wrong, I don't care too much what they say. I like something that's well-written, something interesting or says something in a new way but I think for most stuff, as long as it doesn't sound ridiculous, it's fine. I think that's true of most people. They don't look for great lyrics but they'll change the station on the radio if they hear really bad ones.

With your fusion of various styles, did you realize how influential the band would be?

Not when we were doing it. We thought it was a pretty risky thing to do, especially *Remain in Light*. They said it sounded too black for white stations and too white for black radio. So we were left with nothing. It did pretty good in Europe because radio isn't segregated there. It seemed like we were out on a limb, but then right after that everybody else started doing it, so after that it didn't become so difficult.

Though Talking Heads are always up to the minute, they stand outside of fashion in that you don't have to resort to strange hairstyles or breakdances to prove you are up with the times.

I respect the wild clothes and kooky haircuts. I like looking through a magazine going, "Gosh, look at that!" I mean, that's fun for me too. □



Tina Weymouth

LOS ANGELES—Christintina. The syllables flow together like one word, obscuring the reality that they represent two separate individuals, Chris Frantz and Martina — now Tina — Weymouth, the rhythmic backbone of Talking Heads. Drummer Frantz and bassist Weymouth lay the foundation on which Byrne and the rest of the band construct their houses of progressive art-funk. When Frantz and Weymouth play together, it does seem as if they are one unit, playing off and playing with each other. Not only that, they have their own separate band (The Tom Tom Club) and they are husband and wife with a two-year-old son, Robin.

Jokes Frantz about how their relationship affects Talking Heads, "Generally, I think it makes things easier for the band. It's always like 'Ask Chris and Tina' and 'Get Chris and Tina.' It's much easier than saying 'Go get Chris and go get Tina.'"

Humor aside, being in two bands and trying to raise a child can't be the easiest way to keep a marriage together, but Frantz and Weymouth keep the pressure low by maintaining a residence in the Bahamas and letting Robin travel on tour with them. "Everybody in the band seems to enjoy having the kid around," explains Frantz. "He has a stabilizing effect and a normalizing effect on everyone, especially when you live in a slightly rarified atmosphere, like if you're in the studio for a month straight or on the road for eight months. Kids have a way of bringing people down to earth."

CHRIS & TINA'S RHYTHM METHOD

Though they admit their social lives have become a bit more conservative since Robin's birth, neither of them longs for the traditional American family life. "The middle class and all that upward striving? I don't think so," says Weymouth. "As far as I can see that just complicates life. I'm more inclined to find the greener pastures are the more pastoral ones. I sometimes wish I were a nun in the old days. I could have just a lot of solitude, meditate, read and garden — because my life is so much of the opposite. The middle class has never appealed to me."

But the demands of raising a child, and their commitments to Talking Heads, have kept them from spending full-time on the third Tom Tom Club album. The first album, self-titled and released in 1981, was a surprise hit on the black and dance charts in America as well as all over Europe. The biggest hit, "Genius of Love," with its tongue-in-cheek references to James Brown and Bohannon among others, tapped a growing interest in black American funk. The entire album, a lighthearted mix of funk, rap, and Caribbean influences, has little of the seriousness of a Talking Heads project. "It's a nice break," says Chris in regards to the Tom Tom Club. "It's not that Talking Heads isn't a refreshing experience also. But it's fun. I've just gotten to the point where I enjoy being in the studio. For a long time, I didn't like it that much when compared to the stage. This is different because Tina and I are the boss ultimately, even though we don't go around acting like the boss. If we don't like something, we don't have to endure it."

The second album, *Close To The Bone*, didn't perform as well as its predecessor and both Frantz and Weymouth are less pleased with the album. "We had just finished up a lot of work with the Talking Heads, Tina had the baby and we really didn't have the time to put in what we wanted. Although we're certainly not embarrassed by it or anything. This [next] one, we're going to be a little more thoughtful about," notes Frantz.

In fact, they're approaching the next album as a collection of singles. "We always wanted to make singles, but nobody ever wanted to release just singles because there's more money to be made with al-

bums. We decided this time to finally go for it and just wait until we had a bunch of singles and make our own compilation," comments Weymouth, who doesn't know when the project will be completed. "We're just doing it in our own good time. Talking Heads had been a priority and now my son's a priority. I can write songs anytime but I can't watch my baby grow up anytime."

Even without the Frantz/Weymouth-led Tom Tom Club, Weymouth remains an anomaly in the world of pop music. Seven years after Talking Heads' first album was released, there still aren't many female bass players. "That again," she says incredulously after being asked how she at first fit into the male-dominated profession. "I think they [the band] saw it as an advantage to have a woman and my choice was bass because that was the only instrument left over. There may have been times when I might have gotten disturbed or slightly depressed and I would have looked around for something to blame. That one [being a woman] appeared too obvious so I always shunned it and I avoided falling into that dilemma."

"That's not been a problem for a long, long time as my problems are the same as men at this point. I'm trying to better my situation without too much regard for my gender. Also, I did have the problem of how I could be a mother at the same time because I didn't have a wife or a housewife to take care of things at home. For that, I have to be real organized and practical, which is difficult for me because it's not always easy for me to be practical. I just have to do it; it's like taking medicine."

Rhythmically, Talking Heads have evolved into a more complex unit over the last few years, with Frantz and Weymouth bearing the brunt of the change — after all, it was their rhythm which had fueled a four-piece band and is now expected to power a much larger group. At one point, the band toured with two bassists, Weymouth and master funk player, Busta Jones. "It worked out to be like, pardon the expression, tits on a bull," reflects Frantz on why Jones was dropped.

"It was kind of a misadventure, but it worked out better than I

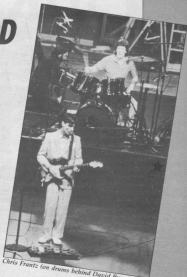
thought it would," adds Weymouth. "What happened in the studio was we all played more than our own instruments. On some tracks, there was more than one bass part. Maybe two or three people played bass. Jerry Harrison organized the crew for that tour, and I knew Busta before Jerry did, so Jerry figured it would work out real good. Jerry didn't realize that one bass player for live appearances could do the same things. Two bass players is like two kings in one palace."

"You don't find that as often as you find more keyboards or guitars. On a lot of songs, we did do contrapuntal stuff and it worked out very nicely, but then there were other songs where there were too many players and not enough for them to do. The next time we went out, we decided that when we wanted a contrapuntal bass part, that we could accomplish it with a keyboard bass."

"I liked playing with Busta. He gave me a lot of confidence; after the band had gotten a real bass player, I realized in fact that I was a real bass player. I felt good."

Though both Frantz and Weymouth agree that Talking Heads is basically David Byrne's band, they all have input. "We have about as much input as we want to have," says Frantz. "If we don't want to have any input, we can pretty much count on David to boss the situation. If we want to have input, then he stops and listens. We no longer treat it like it's a competition; like David's the winner because he gets his picture in the magazines more often."

"David has a strong desire to mold and shape it, but he's real open in the beginning where we'll all jam and create various parts together," explains Weymouth. "David will later just jam on top of it vocally so it's really like a very organized jam. We'll make a tape recording and then we'll save all those bits and choose the good ones we all like. We might take bits from one jam and bits from another and put them together. We create a verse and a chorus that way and eventually it gets built up in layers and David improvises over the top of it vocally. On the last album, David did scat-type singing because he didn't have the words written in advance. Some things he sang right off the bat the way it was finished. He just put words to it and changed the sounds



Chris Frantz (on drums) belted David Byrne

to words."

Despite the increasing complexity of Talking Heads' music, neither Frantz nor Weymouth are fans of instrumental virtuosity, a holdover from their early days when simplicity was the key. "I have a lot of respect for a lot of different musicians but I just can't take flashy technique too seriously," observes Frantz. "I see who generally has had an effect on music and it's generally not the flashy technique people. There was a time when these types of musicians, from the Jimi Hendrix and Mahavishnu days, were having a real profound effect. Lately what seems to be driving home is people that play with a lot of space between the parts, whether you're Shamalar or Talking Heads."

"I go along with Chris that way," admits Weymouth. "I still appreciate good taste over technique. I prefer less when it comes to bass playing, rather than more. The danger is when your technique improves you want to put in too much and get real jazz and that's something I try to avoid. I don't want that to happen. I still prefer, when I go see live music, to see music that's fun to dance to. All that jazzy stuff isn't that great; it doesn't make you want to dance. It interferes with that." □